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Structuring your script really means making sure that you are servicing the story you are trying to tell. —*Shonda Rhimes*

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CHAPTER RECAP

Before you begin writing your script, it's important to understand how a standard, one-hour television drama is structured. Typically on network television, there are about five acts roughly lasting about 11 pages each. Here is how Shonda sees the structure of each of the acts:

- ▶ Act 1: Introduce your characters and present the problem
- ▶ Act 2: Escalate the problem
- ▶ Act 3: Worst case scenario happens
- ▶ Act 4: Begin the ticking clock
- ▶ Act 5: Characters reach their moment of victory

It is helpful to think about how you want each of your acts to end as you begin to lay out the structure of your episode. Work these out ahead of time and properly set your story up for them, rather than dumping a twist at the end of each act just for excitement's sake.

The other essential components of your episodes are your A, B, and C storylines. The A storyline involves your main character and is the core of your show, your B storyline is secondary and helps the narrative keep moving forward, and the C storyline, sometimes referred to as “the runner,” is smallest and holds the least weight.

SUBCHAPTERS

- ▶ The Five Acts of Television
- ▶ Always Know Where to End Your Acts
- ▶ Mapping Out A, B, and C Stories
- ▶ Know What the Rules Are Before You Break Them

NOTES

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TAKE IT FURTHER

- ▶ Learn more about structuring a script for television [here](#).
- ▶ In the era of streaming television, structuring a story around commercial breaks is no longer absolutely necessary. If you are writing a TV show that you envision on one of these streaming platforms, how do you think you should be approaching structure? Discuss with your classmates in [The Hub](#).

ASSIGNMENT

- ▶ Revisit one of the shows you were watching for your assignment in Chapter 2. Take five episodes and map out in detail how the story is told in each of the acts. Does each episode consistently follow an act-by-act formula? Is there an example in the show where the writers broke the rules of structure and told the story in a completely new or different way?

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